

# **KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

## **STAFF NOTE**

### **Review Item:**

Task Force on Assessment and Accountability

### **Applicable Statute or Regulation:**

KRS 158.6453

### **History/Background:**

***Existing Policy.*** The Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS) was implemented in 1999, as the means to carry out the requirements of Kentucky Revised Statute 158.6453, which charges the Kentucky Board of Education with the responsibility to create and implement an assessment and accountability system for the state's public schools.

CATS includes the Kentucky Core Content Tests in seven subject areas; nonacademic data, including dropout, graduation and attendance rates; writing portfolios; alternate assessments for students with severe disabilities; and ACT, PLAN and EXPLORE. The Core Content Tests include multiple-choice and short-answer questions for each subject area.

CATS provides unique goals for each of the state's public schools and districts to meet, and schools and districts are held accountable for meeting those goals. Data from CATS is used to inform parents, teachers, administrators and the general public about schools' progress. Results from subject-area testing in CATS are approved by the U.S. Department of Education for use to comply with the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act.

In summer 2008, Education Commissioner Jon E. Draud called for the creation of the Task Force on Assessment and Accountability to review Kentucky's public school assessment and accountability system. "A major objective is to achieve consensus by Democratic and Republican policymakers on the makeup of the assessment and accountability system," Draud said. "All policymakers want what's best for students, and this task force will provide the means to achieve that."

Statewide organizations, partner groups and leaders of the Kentucky Senate and House of Representatives were asked to name policymakers and experts in the field to serve as task force members. The members of the task force are:

- Jim Applegate, vice president for Academic Affairs, Council on Postsecondary Education (Richard Crofts and Dianne Bazell substituted at some meetings.)
- Joe Brothers, chair, Kentucky Board of Education

- Dale Brown, superintendent, Warren County (representing the Partnership for Successful Schools)
- Ken Draut, associate commissioner—assessment and accountability, Kentucky Department of Education
- Paula Eaglin, Kentucky Association of Professional Educators
- Elaine Farris, deputy commissioner, Kentucky Department of Education
- Rep. Tim Firkins, 38<sup>th</sup> District, Louisville
- Jenny Lynn Hatter, instructional supervisor, Harrison County (representing the Kentucky Association of School Administrators) (Andy Dotson, substitute)
- Marlene Helm, commissioner of social services, Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government
- Rep. Jimmy Higdon, 24<sup>th</sup> District, Lebanon
- Brenda Jackson, past president, Kentucky School Boards Association
- Sen. Dan Kelly, 14<sup>th</sup> District, Springfield
- Mike Lafavers, district assessment coordinator, Boyle County (representing the Kentucky Association of School Councils)
- Roger Marcum, superintendent, Marion County (representing the Kentucky Association of School Superintendents)
- Sen. Vernie McGaha, 15<sup>th</sup> District, Russell Springs
- Suzanne McGurk, system registrar, Kentucky Community Technical College System (Michael Krause, substitute)
- Rep. Harry Moberly, 81<sup>st</sup> District, Richmond
- Helen Mountjoy, secretary, Education Cabinet
- Sharron Oxendine, president, Kentucky Education Association
- Frank Rasche, legislative liaison, Kentucky Department of Education
- Wayne Roberts, district assessment coordinator, Wayne County (representing the Kentucky Association of Assessment Coordinators)
- Rep. Carl Rollins, 56<sup>th</sup> District, Midway
- Sandy Rutledge, president-elect, Kentucky PTA
- Bob Sexton, executive director, Prichard Committee
- Steve Stevens and Diana Taylor, Kentucky Chamber of Commerce
- Sen. Johnny Ray Turner, 29<sup>th</sup> District, Drift

David Spence, Southern Regional Education Board, served as facilitator and Doris Redfield, Edvantia, served as a psychometric advisor to the task force. Meetings of the task force were webcast and open to the public in the state board room. The original schedule called for monthly half-day meetings from August to November. Via e-mail and press release, the task force sought and received written input from teachers, administrators, parents, businesspeople, elected officials, education advocacy groups and others.

At the first meeting on August 5, task force members identified twelve topics for specific consideration and discussion: writing portfolios, balance of student/school accountability, normative/national comparisons, alternate assessment, formative/diagnostic assessments, college readiness, assessments of/for student learning, longitudinal testing models, arts/humanities assessments (performance-based), timeliness of results, narrowing

curriculum focus and testing times with current system and analysis of technical programs incorporating the ACT assessments (EXPLORE, PLAN and the ACT) into the accountability system.

The conversation moved quickly to discussion of how much change could occur in the assessment system without forcing regeneration of the growth lines in the accountability model. After multiple discussions about the amount of change and potential timeframes for implementation, Dr. Draud further elaborated the charge to the task force with the following directions.

- Keep the trend lines from 2008 to 2014 intact. To continue our progress toward proficiency by 2014, no major changes should occur in the accountability model prior to 2014.
- Consider modifying arts and humanities, the writing portfolio, writing on-demand and alternate assessments. Modifications to these areas can be done without affecting the trend line, and reaching consensus on modifications in some or all of these areas is a top priority of the task force.
- Generate a list of potential changes that could be considered after 2014, including areas for revamping the assessment and accountability system in the future.
- Develop a legislative package based on recommendations from the task force and submit that for consideration during the 2009 General Assembly session. The end result of these changes is to create greater harmony among the various stakeholders on the assessment system.

The first topic selected for discussion by the members was the writing portfolio assessment. The topic became the primary focus of the task force meetings. The members shared their experiences and the positions of the groups or constituents they represented. Some members felt strongly the current system was sound in design but needed improvements in training and implementation. Others strongly felt writing portfolios should be removed from accountability and replaced with a system to evaluate a school's writing program.

While the members quickly agreed the portfolio process was important to instruction and writing was a critical skill for Kentuckians to master, the group could not reach agreement on the role the writing portfolio should have in the accountability system. With two meetings remaining, Dr. Draud declared the task force at an impasse on the issue of writing portfolios and asked the group to move forward with other topics.

The group moved to a discussion of how arts and humanities should be assessed. The members agreed the current paper and pencil assessment did not adequately measure the kinds of school programs desired. The test is limited to assessing response to the arts and not creating and performing that are heart of strong school programs. Phil Shepherd, KDE Arts and Humanities Consultant, described a school program evaluation model that has been piloted in twenty elementary schools. The evaluation instrument generates a number value that could potentially be included in accountability calculations. The task force was very positive about the program evaluation model for arts and humanities, but did express concerns about availability of teachers and resources to support a strong

school-based arts program and the availability of state appropriations to support development and implementation of a program evaluation model.

During seven meetings (August 5 and 26, September 18 and 30, October 14 and 29, and November 7), the task force members discussed a variety of assessment and accountability issues and heard informational presentations from experts both within and outside the state. Topics ranged from the purposes of assessment systems, writing portfolios, arts and humanities assessments, the characteristics of formative, interim and summative assessments, and the advantages of developing a balanced assessment system with formative and summative components that focus both on assessments *for* and *of* learning. The members commented that the task force process had been a learning experience and they had greater knowledge and understanding of multiple assessment topics.

“Assessment and accountability are polemic topics, and not just in Kentucky,” said Dr. Draud. “Many—including the members of this task force— have strong opinions. But, this group came to consensus on some key areas, providing the Department and KBE with an early blueprint to help us maintain accountability to 2014.”

#### **Policy Issue (s):**

The task force recommended four items. The first recommendation is potentially the basis for legislative action. The other recommendations can inform future work of KDE.

- 1. Expand a pilot project that enabled assessment of elementary schools’ arts programs.** The project provided the means to measure schools’ arts instructional programs against standards for curriculum, instruction, assessment and organizational support for the arts and humanities program. The task force recommends that the project be expanded statewide and to all grade levels. The program evaluation model for assessment of the arts would be phased in to replace the paper and pencil assessment currently administered with full implementation by 2012. Data from the program evaluation would be used to generate a school’s academic index for the content area of arts and humanities. KBE will need to decide whether to include the evaluation model in its legislative package.
- 2. Encourage formative assessments.** Formative assessments are those that encourage learning and provide direct and immediate feedback to students and teachers. Formative assessments provide roadmaps for individual student learning and show how well each student masters standards.
- 3. Work toward concise standards and balanced assessments.** The task force supports reviewing the state’s subject-area standards and ensuring that those are rigorous and relevant. The group also wants a focus on assessments that are accurate, efficient and provide detailed information on how well students attain specific standards.

4. **Provide teacher training and preparation related to assessment** – The goal is to focus on standards and different types of assessment to foster a sense of “assessment literacy” among educators. Assessment literacy will enable educators to use testing to best meet the needs of students.

**Groups Consulted and Brief Summary of Responses:**

The recommendations of the task force will be discussed at upcoming meetings of the School Curriculum, Assessment and Accountability Council (SCAAC) and the Local Superintendents Advisory Council (LSAC). Staff will share input from these meetings in December.

**Impact on Getting to Proficiency:**

Improvements to Kentucky’s assessment and accountability system both pre and post 2014 are critical to clarifying performance goals for schools so that every Kentucky student may be prepared and proficient. The work of the task force begins the important discussions about the next generation of assessment and accountability in Kentucky.

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**Deputy Commissioner**

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**Commissioner of Education**

**Date:**

December 2008